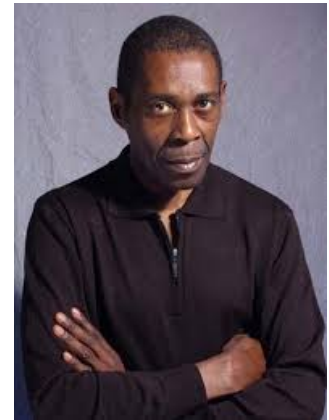
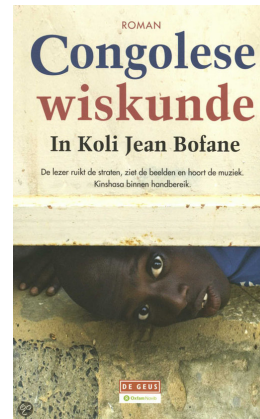
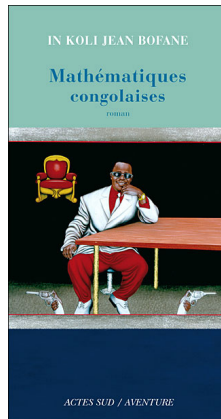


Mathématiques Congolaises Actes Sud, 2008, ISBN 978-2-7427-7457-9, 320 pp.

Congolese Wiskunde *In Koli Jean Bofane* De Geus, 2013, ISBN 978-9-0445-1617-3, 320 pp.

This is a novel of the Congolese war orphan In Koli Jean Bofane who now lives in Brussels. The history is playing in Kinshasa where a young man Célio Matemona, who, because of his love for the introductory booklet of mathematics that he almost knows by heart is called Célio Mathématik. Tshilombo is the head of a military department of information, working for the



In Koli Jean Bofane

president. Instead of gathering information, they rather organize things such that this allows them to spread the information they want in favor of the president. For example, he lets his assistant Bamba Togbia organize a pro-presidential demonstration, but opens fire on the hired ‘protesters’ to demonize the opposition party, and one of Célio’s friends gets killed.

One day, Tshilombo, impressed by Célio’s wit and his agile use of mathematical terms, hires him to work for his department. One of his successful missions is to organize a spying scandal, which is explained as a preparation for a French invasion. Thus just to put France in a bad light, and an innocent French citizen coming to work for his company in Congo is the victim.

Bamba who is tired of his job is dreaming of retirement in his village with his family. To this end, he consults a sorcerer, who asks him to bring something personal from a dear one and a black rooster. Something personal stands for the soul and the rooster for the life of somebody. He gives a primitive toothbrush stolen from the sorcerer, and when the sorcerer dies, Bamba is so afraid of the curse that he dares not to sleep during the night, and is fighting to stay awake as much as possible during day time.

When Tshilombo organizes a fake coup where a video message that he has prepared is broadcasted by national television. The video shows the leader of the opposition who allegedly has invaded and gives a direct speech from there. Bamba who has organized everything is promised a big amount of money for his discretion, but of course he is killed and the fake coup is foiled. However Bamba had foreseen something and leaves a diary disclosing all the wicked games played by Tshilombo, and these are found by Célio who leaks the info to several journals. In the epilogue, the first Congolese democratic elections are prepared (which actually took place in 2006).

One main theme is to illustrate how difficult it is to keep your integrity when you are hungry. Both government and opposition are as corrupt as can be and reflects the situation of around 1997. Célio lost his family during the 1977 war and is fostered and educated by a Belgian Father Lolos. His love for mathematics is stimulated by a mathematics book for secondary school that belonged to his father. This is also the reason why he thinks in mathematical analogies and he uses mathematical terms when he proposes strategies to Tshilombo. This is enough for his environment to consider him as an intellectual.

So all in all there is little mathematics in this book. However to have a math-loving hero in a novel is rather exceptional. The mathematical analogues he uses in his discussions remain on an elementary level and are for the sake of the theme of the book, without being essential or functional. The titles of the chapters also refer to some mathematical term. Of course the logic and the rules of mathematics also refer to an integer and non-corruptible system, as opposed to the society in which Célio has to grow up.

A. Bultheel